

Message Text

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SUBJ: DRUGS AND THE MEDIA

1. FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM AN AIRGRAM WHICH IS BEING
FORWARDED TO DEPARTMENT ANALYZING THE TREATMENT WHICH THE
DRUG PROBLEM IS RECEIVING IN THE COLOMBIAN MEDIA.

2. DRUGS AND THEIR IMPACT ON COLOMBIAN SOCIETY HAVE
BECOME A MAJOR FOCUS OF THE MASS MEDIA IN COLOMBIA. SEVERAL
YEARS AGO DRUGS WERE OF MARGINAL CONCERN TO THE MEDIA. DRUG
SMUGGLING WAS AN EXOTIC TOPIC TO BE LEFT TO GOVERNMENT
OFFICIALS AND THE POLICE. VICTIMS WERE NAMELESS INDIVI-
DUALS IN THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE WHOSE FATE
WAS OF LITTLE CONCERN TO THE AVERAGE COLOMBIAN.

3. GRADUALLY, THIS PERCEPTION HAS CHANGED. INCREASING POLITICAL
PRESSURE FROM THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER COUNTRIES COMBINED
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WITH A GROWING AWARENESS THAT THE FLOURISHING DRUG TRADE
WAS INDEED AFFECTING COLOMBIAN SOCIETY IN PROFUND WAYS,
HAVE PROMPTED THE COLOMBIAN NEWS MEDIA TO PAY MORE ATTENTION
TO THE SUBJECT.

4. EDITORS AND PUBLISHERS NOW CONSIDER DRUGS TO BE A PRIME
NEWS TOPIC. HARDLY A DAY GOES BY WITHOUT PUBLICATION OF

STORIES ON DRUG TRAFFICKING. REFERENCE TO DRUGS IN COLUMNS AND EDITORIALS IS COMMONPLACE.

5. COLOMBIAN CONCERNS ARE MANY-FOLD: THE BAD IMAGE WHICH THE COUNTRY HAS ACQUIRED ABROAD; THE CORRUPTION ENGENDERED BY TRAFFICKING; DRUG-GENERATED MONIES CONTRIBUTING TO INFLATION; INCIPENT ADDICTION AMONG YOUNG COLOMBIANS.

6. PARTICULARLY GALLING FOR SENSITIVE COLOMBIANS HAS BEEN THE PORTRAYAL ABROAD OF THEIR COUNTRY AS THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF ILLICIT NARCOTICS. SOMEWHAT DEFENSIVELY, THE COLOMBIANS HAVE RESPONDED THAT IF THE DEMAND FOR THESE PRODUCTS DID NOT EXIST ABROAD, THEY WOULD NOT BE CULTIVATED IN COLOMBIA.

7. COLOMBIA'S PERCEPTION OF THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN AFFECTED TO SOME DEGREE BY THE DRUG PROBLEM. WHILE THE TWO COUNTRIES REMAIN FRIENDS AND ALLIES WITH SOLID BASES OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION, DRUGS ARE A PUBLICLY-PERCEIVED STAIN ON OUR BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. IT COULD NOT BE OTHERWISE GIVEN THE VOLUME OF NEWS COVERAGE ON THE CONTROVERSIAL TOPIC.

8. OUR INFORMAL MEDIA SURVEYS, SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR, INDICATE THAT THE DRUG QUESTION RECEIVES MORE ATTENTION THAN ANY OTHER U.S. RELATED PROBLEM.

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9. COVERAGE OF THE DRUG PROBLEM IS NOT LIMITED TO NEWSPAPERS. THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA - RADIO AND TELEVISION - HAVE TAKEN AN ACTIVE INTEREST IN DRUGS. RADIO REACHES A MASS AUDIENCE IN COLOMBIA. SOME 300 STATIONS HAVE AN ESTIMATED AUDIENCE OF ABOUT 18 MILLION LISTERNERS EVERY DAY. THE NEWS PROGRAMS OF THESE STATIONS INCLUDE INFORMATION ON DRUG TRAFFICKING ON A REGULAR BASIS. THE MININSTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH SPONSORS SPORADIC ANTI-DRUG CAMPAIGNS ON RADIO. ONE OF THE NEGATIVE EFFORTS OF THE PUBLICITY, ACCORDING TO RADIO EXECUTIVES, IS THAT FARMERS IN THE DRUG-GROWING REGIONS ARE MADE AWARE OF THE FACT THAT THEY MAY BE ABLE TO EARN MORE PRODUCING MARIJUANA THAN IN GROWING TRADITIONAL CROPS.

10. THE DRUG PROBLEM - ITS ORIGINS, ITS EFFECTS ON COLOMBIA, THE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS - HAS BECOME A QUESTION OF ALMOST DAILY CONCERN FOR THE COLOMBIAN MEDIA. NO LONGER IS THE PROBLEM ONE TO BE ADDRESSED EXCLUSIVELY BY POLICE AND MEDICAL SPECIALISTS, BY CRIMINAL COURT JUDGE AND REHABILITATION WORKERS. IT IS A QUESTION WHICH, IN ALL ITS RAMIFICATIONS, CONFRONTS THE COLOMBIAN NATION.

11. THIS IS A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT. PUBLIC OPINION IS A FORCE

TO BE RECKONED WITH IN A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY LIKE COLOMBIA
AND THE WIDE-RANGING DISCUSSION OF DRUGS IS PRODUCING A BETTER-
INFORMED PUBLIC, AWARE OF ITS ENVOLVING RESPONSIBILITIES
IN THE FLIGHT AGAINST ILLICIT NARCOTICS.

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